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REF: VILNIUS 227

Summary and Introduction

¶11. (SBU) Charge hosted a meeting May 20 to introduce Olga Kozulina, daughter and lead representative of political prisoner Aleksandr Kozulin, to French Ambassador Mireille Musso -- currently representing the EU Presidency -- and recently-arrived European Commission Delegation Charge Jean-Eric Holzapfel. Musso, who has been in Belarus since February 2007, had not previously met any member of the Kozulin family; Holtzapfel had previous contact in an earlier capacity. Kozulina presented views of herself and her father on his possible release, the impact of sanctions, parliamentary elections later this year, European standards, and the role of Russia in Belarus. End summary and introduction.

Kozulin Hopes for Release

¶12. (SBU) Having recently spent three days visiting her father in jail May 3-6, Kozulina voiced her father's belief that only the combined efforts of the U.S. and EU could result in his release by the end of the year. She noted that her family has received no hints from the GOB of any move to release her father since the offer for him to depart the country. Kozulina told us that her father is optimistic that he will be released, but she is less so.

Kozulina Requests Further EU Sanctions, Pressure

¶13. (SBU) In response to Musso's question of what further steps Kozulin would propose from the EU, Kozulina stated that the EU policy toward Belarus needs to be strengthened. She said that while the twelve conditions put forth by the EU are helpful, if the GOB makes no progress on meeting these conditions, the EU should expand sanctions, asset freezes and/or its travel ban. According to Kozulina, the mere threat of economic sanctions by the EU would "send Lukashenko into shock." Kozulina expressed her father's firm belief that Lukashenko will respond only to nonphysical force, rather than words; she said that "all the dialogue in the world [with Lukashenko] will lead to nothing."

¶14. (SBU) To Musso's objection that sanctions punish only the Belarusian people, Kozulina cited the recent freeing of five political prisoners as evidence that such steps by the USG have been effective, an argument Musso dismissed rather abruptly. Musso further rejected Kozulina's call for EU economic sanctions out of hand, and expressed her view that the EU would consider increasing pressure on the regime only in the event that the parliamentary elections -- scheduled for September -- are mishandled.

Upcoming Parliamentary Elections

¶15. (SBU) Kozulina detailed her intention to run in the September 2008 parliamentary elections on the 110-candidate list of the United Democratic Forces (UDF), as a member of her father's Belarusian

Social Democratic Party-Gramada (BSDP-G). Expressing doubt that she would be permitted by the GOB to register her candidacy or that the elections would yield any opposition representation in parliament, Kozulina emphasized that her principal desire is to spread information to the public about human rights violations and political prisoners in Belarus through informational materials and an active door-to-door campaign. When pressed by Musso for details, Kozulina described the procedures required for a candidate to register and expressed her doubt that even the radio and television time required by law to be allotted each candidate will be permitted by the GOB.

¶16. (SBU) Musso and Holtzapfel agreed with Kozulina that close monitoring the candidates' registration process and progress of free and fair electoral campaigning is critical. Musso suggested that reference to any violations of Belarusian laws governing the campaign process will be the firmest ground to stand on in joint criticisms. Musso asked to be informed about the political process in the run-up to upcoming parliamentary elections and expressed her readiness to levy criticisms if and when violations are observed. Charge underlined our intention to cooperate with the EU, OSCE and Belarusian Helsinki Committee in election monitoring and information-sharing over the coming months.

Kozulin's Vision of Role of EU, Russia

¶17. (SBU) If elected to the Presidency in 2011, in addition to Kozulin's stated agenda to improve the human rights situation and expand a full range of freedoms for the Belarusian people, Kozulina described her father's intention to undertake a series of economic reforms aimed at transformation into a market-based economy. In addition, Kozulina expressed his plan to carry Belarus towards

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European standards of democracy.

¶18. (SBU) While a Kozulin administration would remain friendly with Russia, particularly cooperating in areas of transit and loans, Kozulina stated that a union between Belarus and Russia would no longer be possible. While agreeing with Musso that a balance between Russia and the EU will be difficult to achieve, Kozulina believes the main focus of economic and political ties to be with the EU rather than Russia. Kozulina stated that Russia is neither a model on human rights issues nor economic relationships; Europe is the best example for both. Kozulina debunked their perception that her father has close ties with Russia and described her many unsuccessful attempts to meet with Putin or a representative of the Russian Embassy in Minsk during more than two and one-half years of her father's imprisonment (reftel). Musso and Holtzapfel were surprised that the GOB did not once express their concern about Kozulin to his family or send condolences upon his wife's recent death.

¶19. (SBU) Kozulina expressed her appreciation to us for arranging this opportunity to meet with EU representatives and again highlighted the importance of the EU's support in securing her father's release and improved human rights in Belarus. Charge underlined the Embassy's anticipation of further dialogue between Kozulina and EU representatives, with or without U.S. participation.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) Post initiated this first meeting between Kozulina and representatives of the primary EU offices in Minsk. We hope that there are further meetings. While agreeing to disagree on the utility of economic sanctions and observing a somewhat challenging attitude of Musso towards Kozulina, it sends an important message to both the regime and the opposition that the EU -- if a bit combatively -- has at last engaged with a key opposition figure.

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Cloud